

**To be held for distribution until after 5.00pm Monday 29<sup>th</sup> November**

*Apologies to anyone reading this document – it was written as my guidance notes for the speech and therefore contains some shorthand phrases and possibly some gaps that I intended to fill in on stage. On the assumption that any ad-libs are not of substance you should have most of what I intended to say here. I simply hope that it is of some interest or value, even if to disagree with!*

*Many thanks, Bill Payne*

**SESSION 4 FOR MONDAY 29 NOVEMBER 1999**

**INNOVATION IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

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In thinking about what I could say, that would be of value to your debate in Australia, I have been through a number of different versions of this speech. The easiest version is the long list of practical examples of what we have been doing in the U.K. and Europe. It became clear to me that this is probably the least helpful and most irrelevant approach that I could take.

This morning you heard Mavis McDonald talking about our U.K. perspective on Social Exclusion, and how this concept has developed, and Alex has just talked about issues of self-determination, social inclusiveness and partnerships between indigenous housing providers, and public and community housing. These are the real issues that are important, and the ones that I will try to address. In a different social and cultural environment, we in the U.K. are struggling with similar problems to those outlined by Alex.

If there is one thing that I have learnt as our approach has evolved, it is that in words of the song “it ain’t what you do but the way you do it”. In the U.K. we have had ‘death by initiatives’, there is always a new political priority and a new idea being introduced, often several at the same time. Some of them have been viable and produced good results, others have been disastrous. However, the one common theme is that we are usually implementing ‘top down’ plans and proposals. The initiatives that are successful are generally those where community relationships are stronger, and we have really understood what we mean by working together. If there is one valuable lesson to learn in our development of community partnerships, it is the increased awareness that relationships are what make the difference. Although funding and procedures are important, these will come to nothing, if we do not have the right attitudes and expectations of each other.

The longest serving Member of Parliament in the U.K. is Tony Benn, a socialist MP of conviction who describes the following test that he uses to decide whether he can trust an individual when he meets them. He asks five simple questions:

- Who are you?
- What power have you got?
- Where did you get it from?
- Who do you use it for? and finally
- How do I get rid of you?

If you are comfortable in a partnership, having applied the Tony Benn test, the chances are that you’re genuinely working together.

In the U.K. we have seen simple building contracts and many other straightforward relationships being described as partnerships. Often represented by a photographer capturing the image of the civic dignitary, planting a tree and shaking the hand of a grateful resident in front of it. Real partnerships cannot be formed through this sort of stage management, nor are they quite as tranquil.

A working partnership cannot be anodyne, unquestioning and apolitical. On the basis that there are never enough resources to go around, we are dealing with the distribution of power and resources and deciding who gets what. This is a political relationship, but with a small 'p'. We are involving ourselves in the process of change and allocation of resources and need to understand the risks that we all take. In almost every case however it is the community that has the most to lose.

It is clear that a simple landlord service is not enough for tackling social exclusion. A landlord however big or small does have unique links into a community that are based on routine, everyday contact. If the will is there, these links offer us the opportunity to play a significant part in tackling poverty and social exclusion, but not on the terms that we have traditionally been used to.

In the U.K. we have started to develop initiatives under the label of "housing plus" taking a wider view of our services. Some housing associations, like my own, have broadened the service that we offer to include welfare rights support, youth and community workers, provision of furniture, needle exchanges, work in local schools, anti-crime initiatives and some that seem to defy definition.

In mid 1990's the Labour Party in opposition called a Commission on Social Justice. The resulting report was clear that communities do not become strong because they are rich, rather they become rich because they are strong. The Commission called for the strengthening of 'social capital', the links and networks within communities that arise through everyday life in vibrant healthy neighbourhoods.

If we are to innovate it is no longer appropriate for us to work toward simple outputs, which are the product of a process, we have to make that subtle change and concentrate upon outcomes. Outcomes are the results and the visible effects of our actions, and these are not necessarily capable of measurement in terms of bricks and mortar. We have to take risks, but be aware of them. In the maternity wing of the hospital where my partner works there was a poster promoting the midwifery service with a slogan saying "the first five minutes of life are the most dangerous", in felt-tip pen written on the bottom someone had added "the last five are pretty risky too". The entertaining graffiti, apart from being funny, is actually very obvious. The risks of birth, and all that follows are open-ended, as are the risks in any new, meaningful relationship. It is a journey together into the unknown.

I am privileged to be the Chair of a charity based in the U.K. called Homeless International, working with slum and pavement dwellers on three continents and in 14 countries. Recently in London I met a young Pakistani architect working in a huge slum community with nearly three million residents. She lived in the community and worked with slum dwellers installing drainage and sanitation, having persuaded the Pakistan Government to supply the sewage treatment plant, on condition that the community provided its own drainage to connect to it. She had a powerful view that her community does not want to participate with the work of professionals, they want the professionals to participate in the work of the community.

Are we ourselves innovating in a way that helps communities become strong and develop?

Any community has a finite capacity if it works alone. If it is to develop it has to draw in experience and skills from outside and this can be from professionals or from other communities with relevant

experience. Landlords are, as I said, unique in comparison with other voluntary and statutory organisations because we are already in those communities for the long term, and can be the starting point around which new partnerships can evolve. That is not to say that we have to take the lead role though.

If we are to innovate in community partnerships, we in the U.K. have found the most difficult task is to come to terms with the simple idea that it takes considerable time and effort to develop relationships before things start to happen on the ground. Often we have found in Yorkshire Housing that the most effective way to tackle an issue is to highlight it, and translate it into the most simplistic explanation, and then allow the community to scale it up for themselves in partnership with us and others. This way you are most likely to adopt the solutions that will work to match local needs.

It is my view that if you help others strengthen themselves, you are engaging in a process that strengthens your own position. In the mining communities of South Yorkshire, we have been through traumatic times with pit closures, massive unemployment, leading to drugs, violence and crime on an unprecedented scale. Yorkshire Housing has spent well over 5 years developing relationships and investing time and money into them. There is little to offer those seeking tangible evidence resulting from our investment, but these relationships are now the strongest single force for regeneration and effective action. In particular, the women who have been sponsored with training, to move beyond managing children, unemployed husbands and the rest of the household, to learn new skills at college have been one of the most remarkable forces.

As with any Government or funding agency initiative we are continuously under pressure to deliver “outputs”. How many homes? How many jobs? etc etc. These are often scheduled to fit in with elections and the political process and have to be delivered by agencies contracted to deliver on behalf of government. More often than not the size of an organisation correlates to the power it wields in partnerships created from a ‘top down’ strategy. To combat the number crunchers approach and validate the role of the less powerful partners, we have a need for more qualitative measures of successful work.

However, we have been very weak in developing the concept of qualitative measures. How do we really assess the nature of these growing relationships and know how to challenge decisions, actions and expenditure in terms of what it does for the cohesiveness of any partnership and community?

In an attempt to address this concern, the Chartered Institute of Housing permitted me, as its President, to initiate research through one of our Universities, and bring together a wide ranging steering group to consider citizenship as a measure of what we do and not so much as a status bestowed on individuals. In addition to looking at a number of other issues we came up with a definition and measure that could be used in any area of social policy and this has three component parts. It is a very simple measure, but in looking at whatever decisions or actions you may be taking, can you measure the impact that you will have on the following areas?

First – the **rights respect self-respect and recognition** that a community or an individual has? Is your action or decision positive or negative in its impact on these issues?

Second – are you enhancing **skills and ability** for the individuals involved in your partnerships?

And finally – are you increasing the **willingness and intention** that people have to join in and work with you on a shared agenda?

A partnership works well when each partner does what they do best, letting others do what they do best, and done in such a way that the parts add up to a workable whole. This kind of community involvement is many sided and makes some of the richest solutions, but it does take time, and more importantly will only develop through practice.

Developing and building citizenship, as a shared objective within any partnership can help strengthen your impact by focussing on peoples lives with a more structured way of thinking. Citizenship is not a miracle cure – just another way of looking at things. Coming back to the definition of our Commission for Social Justice, it is the strong community that becomes rich, not the rich community inevitably becoming strong.

Housing is at the heart of communities, and whether we are volunteers, paid employees, and involved with small or large landlords, we have moral and financial imperatives to get involved. We cannot therefore stand by and watch the areas where we provide homes fall into decline or not reach their full potential. The question is how we make any intervention the most effective and sustainable?

It is a salutary lesson to remind ourselves that in 1948 all members of the United Nations signed the universal declaration of human rights. Among many other things this states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, and necessary social services and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” If this is a basic human right how well are we all doing?

I know that in the U.K. our social exclusion debate is top priority because of the large numbers of people still in remote or marginalised communities that have yet to achieve anything approaching this basic human right.

We are now in a global economy with a power base shifting to those with knowledge and technology. Innovation in community partnerships therefore has to engage with this new era and also be founded upon trust and confidence. Good communication and a shared vision can take us a long way, but we need to take action and develop these relationships by doing things together. As the old saying goes ‘you cannot plough a field by turning it over in your mind’. What this means is that we have to invest in the development of individuals within communities who will in time develop skills and confidence to become community leaders and community entrepreneurs. Funding for this is needed in advance of more ambitious and substantial programmes that will call for innovative partnerships that work.

My conclusion is that much of what has gone before in the U.K. has been too ‘top down’ and has inevitably floundered as a result. ‘Bottom up’ solutions are slower, with a lower profile and challenge the traditional status and perception of professionals. Across the world we are all being challenged to let go, share power and take a step into the dark. They very least we can do is hold hands as we do it, with communities alongside us taking control for themselves.

There are no such things as new ideas –just old ones put together in a different way. I have seen for myself that much of what I have had to say is already well understood here in Australia. It was Basil Fawley that said ‘if Sybil had a degree it would be in the art of stating the bleeding obvious’. I hope I have not been awarded a masters degree in the art and thank you for your attention.